

Bates College SCARAB

Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection

Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library

5-1-2002

Abramowitz, Sheppie oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Follow this and additional works at: http://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh

Recommended Citation

Nicoll, Don, "Abramowitz, Sheppie oral history interview" (2002). *Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection*. 2.
http://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh/2

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

Interview with Sheppie Abramowitz by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Abramowitz, Sheppie

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

May 1, 2002

Place

Washington, D.C.

ID Number

MOH 348

Use Restrictions

© Bates College. This transcript is provided for individual **Research Purposes Only**; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, 70 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, Maine 04240-6018.

Biographical Note

Sheppie (Glass) Abramowitz was born in Baltimore, Maryland on December 17, 1935. Her parents were Ida and Benjamin Glass. She attended the Park School in Baltimore, and then went to Bryn Mawr College to study history. After graduation, she decided to look for work in Washington. She was hired in the office of Congressman Frank Coffin, and worked in that office as a file clerk from 1958 to 1959. She married Morton Abramowitz, a State Department employee, in 1959. They lived in Taipei from 1959 to 1963. She then worked in university governmental relations. Around 1970, she was hired onto Senator Muskie's presidential campaign. She worked on the campaign until its end. She worked again in university governmental relations after leaving the campaign, as well as traveling with her husband. She became active in the International Rescue Committee while working with her husband. At the time of interview she was vice president of the International Rescue Committee.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: personal political interest; working for Frank Coffin; Frank Coffin's staff; marrying Morton Abramowitz; getting hired to the Muskie presidential campaign staff; living in London with Morton; campaign speech writers; Madeleine Albright; Maine people in the campaign; people using the campaign for personal gain; Muskie's advisors;

Muskie's appreciation of Abramowitz; Morton's career; career helping refugees; and modern politicians compared to Muskie.

Indexed Names

Abramowitz, Morton
Abramowitz, Sheppie
Albright, Madeleine Korbel
Bernhard, Berl
Biden, Joseph K.
Bouvier, Mignonne B. "Midge"
Campbell, James "Jim"
Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
Clinton, Bill, 1946-
Coffin, Frank Morey
Cory, Gayle
Daschle, Thomas
Davis, Lanny
Duffey, Joseph
Feingold, Russ, 1953-
Gaither, Jim
Gelb, Les
Glass, Benjamin
Glass, Ida
Halperin, Mort
Holbrook, Richard
Kennedy, Edward Moore, 1932-
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963
Kissinger, Henry, 1923-
Lake, Anthony "Tony"
Lander, Charlie
Leahy, Patrick J.
Lewis, Dan
Lieberman, Joe
McCain, John, 1936-
McEvoy, John
McGovern, George S. (George Stanley), 1922-
McPherson, Anne
McPherson, Harry
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Moose, Dick
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Nelson, Robert
Nicoll, Don

Rasenberger, Raymond J. "Ray"
Redstone, Sumner
Rice, Condoleezza "Condi"
Richardson, Elliot
Rosenblatt, Peter
Rowe, James
Sando, Jack C.
Shrum, Bob
Shulman, Marshall
Snowe, Olympia J. (Olympia Jean), 1947-
Squier, Bob
Storer, Elaine (Swanholm) Clinton Shortall
Toll, Maynard
Valenti, Jack
Vance, Cyrus R. (Cyrus Roberts), 1917-2002
Warnke, Paul
Wellstone, Paul
Wexler, Ann
Wolfowitz, Paul

Transcript

This interview has been slightly revised at the request of the interviewee

Don Nicoll: It is Wednesday afternoon, the 1st day of May, 2002. We are in Washington, D.C. in the offices of the International Rescue Committee. And Don Nicoll is interviewing Sheppie Abramowitz. Sheppie, would you give us your full name, date and place of birth, and the names of your parents?

Sheppie Abramowitz: Sheppie Glass Abramowitz, December 17, 1935, Ida and Benjamin Glass, G-L-A-S-S.

DN: Now, did you, you grew up in Baltimore.

SA: And I grew up in Baltimore, yes.

DN: And did you go to the schools of that city?

SA: No, I went to private school. I went to Park School, which is in Baltimore, and then I went to Bryn Mawr College. And that's- after I graduated is where I hooked up with the Maine people.

DN: And what was your major in college?

SA: History.

DN: Had you had an interest in history and government from childhood?

SA: I had a history, I had an interest since childhood. But one of my first bosses who was Don Nicoll, when he interviewed me, he doesn't remember this, for the job that I'd just walked in off the street, literally off the street and wanted to work in Frank Coffin's office and told him I was from Baltimore. And he said, "Oh, Baltimore politics, they are the most corrupt in the nation." I think it's improved, but that, what he told me was true, and I knew that. Yes, I was always interested.

DN: Were your father and mother interested in politics, or involved?

SA: Not at all.

DN: And why did you decide to go to Capitol Hill and seek a job?

SA: I can't remember why. I just had an idea I wanted to work in Washington. I really can't remember that, why. I had been interested in politics in college, I just did it. You know, if it had been a different time, I might have taken the Foreign Service exam, but I didn't, there wasn't one girl in my graduating class, one girl took the exam, but she wasn't accepted. I mean, it was just a different time.

DN: And so you wandered into Frank Coffin's office, and you were looking for work. Do you remember what you anticipated being able to do in a congressional office?

SA: Well, it was very clear what happened. I think I went to the House Democratic Campaign, one of those committees, and they said that Don Nicoll was looking for a file clerk. It was very, very clear what the job was going to be, but I guess I thought, you know, get in on the ground floor... This was in 1958, I guess. Most women didn't really anticipate having some big deal job, I just thought I would get a job, be on the ground floor, good congressman, and see what would happen. I'm sure that's what I thought.

DN: What did happen?

SA: Well, I was the file clerk and I learned about Maine very, oh, actually it was a good job. Not only because the people were good and because I loved Frank Coffin, but I was diddling around, you know, about getting married I guess. So I couldn't, I probably wasn't so ambitious that being a file clerk. I had a lot of fun up there, I learned a lot, learned a lot about Democratic politics. Don was there, Libby Donahue did the press; Midge [Mignonne Bouvier]. I remember the caseworker, I don't know if you remember her, Elaine.

DN: Elaine (Swanholm) Clinton [Shortall] [Storer].

SA: Right, but that was interesting. I still think being a caseworker is a great job, because you really can make an impact. And probably if I hadn't gotten married and gone off to Taipei, Don would have eventually let me do something else.

DN: What do you remember about Frank Coffin? You said you admired him.

SA: Well, he didn't take himself serious. He, you know, now that I know so much more and know so many more congressmen, he was very interested in the work, intellectually interested, and he had things that he wanted to do for the State of Maine. Of course he was liberal, but I didn't know anybody that wasn't liberal. And he worked hard, had a good sense of humor, he was very smart, and he didn't have his ego out there all the time. Do you think that's right, Don? I think that that probably is right, looking back on it.

And he, you know, included me occasionally in things. It just was a very, you know, it was a fine place to work. And it had the usual, the staff was under some pressure, but it wasn't unbearable.

DN: You were there in '58-'59. When did you leave to get married?

SA: I left in about August to get married, and Mort, Mort had already gone overseas, so I went back to Baltimore in August I guess.

DN: That is of '60 or '59?

SA: Fifty nine, I got married in '59, yes, and just to get ready, I had to go, I was going to, I think I was going to meet Mort in Hong Kong to get married, which flabbergasted my parents. But anyhow, Mort came back to marry me and it just took a while to get through all the State Department stuff. You know, they did a security clearance those days on me. It was ridiculous. But anyhow, I did, he came back, we got married, then I waited to get these clearances, and then I went, we went to Taipei.

DN: And you lost touch essentially with the Maine politics from then until when?

SA: Well, I don't think I lost touch with my buddies. But when we came back, I'm trying to remember, we came back like in '63, Michael was, I can't remember, '65, just before the riots of '65, Michael was born in '63. And I got a job doing something I actually liked very much, working for a university's lobbying office. That's what it was, no matter what they called it, that's what it was, their government relations office, which was very interesting. It was a new thing that universities were doing, and I worked for a really creative guy who actually moved to Maine eventually. And you know, I worked on matching the research interests of the universities to the research interests of the many, many government agencies. It was pretty interesting, and it was flexible, I had two children in that time.

I had been seeing Don on and off I guess because after the, when was it, at one point, before '72, let's say in '70, Don said that they were going to do this exploration of the Senator running for president and did I want to come and work for him, and work in the office. And basically I did, and basically it was something that I knew how to do because it was matching what the office needed to... As I remember the first thing I did was try to match the research needs of the office with all the zillions of outside experts who were setting themselves up to help the potential presidential campaign.

I remember I went to graduate school later and I wanted to do something on presidential task forces, and nobody thought that it was very important, but I think it's somewhere in between. The task forces are important occasionally and you learn something, and on the other hand they are important about keeping people involved.

DN: On the chronology, I remember seeing you in London at some point, I believe Mort was there studying?

SA: Yeah, well I worked for a while, I've forgotten, maybe a year or so. And then Mort, oh I'm, and by the way, the most interesting thing about that is Mort was working for Elliot Richardson, remember that? And Elliot, he went to see Elliot and told him that his wife was working for Ed Muskie, and did Elliot want to get another Foreign Service officer, and he said, "No, why? It's fine." I mean, by then everybody knew that Ed Muskie was going to try to be the candidate.

Anyhow, we went, I've forgotten why, I think that Elliot had one of these job changes, I've forgotten where he went, but Mort had what they called a senior training assignment at the Institute of Strategic Studies, so we all went to London. And, which was fun, we had a great time. And we came back, and then the campaign had changed.

A lot of this is not altogether, I don't remember it all well, had bigger, the aggressive Democrats who thought they had a winner. I've said this to Don all the time, but anyhow, came in. But I did get some kind of job back at the campaign. It wasn't so much fun as it had been, because all of these kind of professional Democrats, who I won't even tell you who they are, they're still around, some of them turned out to be friendly enough, but kind of caved in on the campaign, I would say. I always had a real theory about this, and it was, had nothing to do with me. I mean I had two children, I couldn't have done more than I did on the campaign because Mort was working by then, I think at the Defense Department. Whatever it was, Mort was barely at home, so one of us had to be at home. I really think that had some terrible impact on the campaign. And that one of the senators, one of the problems was that the people who came in to work on the campaign at that point had no idea who Ed Muskie was, or what he stood for, anything about him. And I think they just thought he was a winner, and so there they were. And I think they're the ones that gave him such bad advice, which ultimately, you know. They didn't understand, for instance his, about his relationship with Jane. I just think that that helped bring the campaign down, which it did go down. You agree? I think it did come down. And I guess I left the campaign before the convention, I can't remember but probably did and went back to being a university lobbyist, which was fun, nice.

DN: Let's drop back to 1970 before your interlude in London, and setting up the research operation.

SA: And the speechwriters, oh.

DN: And the speechwriters. Who were some of the people you were involved with in that period?

SA: Well, you know, Jack Sando was a speechwriter, and he was quite friendly. I mean, one of the things I'd have to do would be go to somebody and say, "Look, we need a speech on..." I'm going to tell you one that I remember very clearly, pornography, because Jack Valenti did that. And he, you know, pornog-, this is a perfect example, pornography was a very big deal issue at the time, and we needed advice about how to handle it. And I thought, as I remember, Valenti kind of staked out a way of dealing with it. Do you remember that? We also had, well Jack did a lot of speeches. We also, for the first time, we had Tony Lake. I might have this wrong, but Tony had left [Henry] Kissinger because I think Cambodia, I can't remember but -

DN: That's right, that was the issue.

SA: And he was a very honorable fellow, he could be very hard, you know, he's not very outgoing. But he came and said he wanted to help, I remember this very clearly, he wanted to help us, but he'd have to have a sort of cooling off period because he had been in the government, which he took. Well, Mr. McPherson was there, God bless him, we still see, and he's still around, he was there, and Berl was there. I don't know, Bob Nelson and that other guy, they really weren't helping us on research. I'm trying to think, oh, Ray Rasen---, what is his name?

DN: Ray Rasenberger.

SA: Yes, he was helping us. And, I'm sure if I put my mind to it I'd come up with a lot more people.

DN: Do you remember Jim Campbell?

SA: No, but I remember him because he was on Mort's board later. With a G. Gaither, Jim Gaither, yes, Jim Gaither. He's a, he helped us, do you remember that, Don? Very smart guy. He wasn't extremely warm and friendly to me at that time, which, you know, in later years he was on the board of Carnegie and I always reminded him of that, and he said, "Oh, no, Sheppie, I didn't do that." And I said, "Oh yeah, you did." But he was a very smart and able guy. I mean, it wasn't so hard to get people to help us.

One of the things about campaigns that Don may or may not disagree, people don't want to come into a campaign just to give money, they want to have input. They want to tell the Senator what to do about water, what to do about Israel, what to do about whatever. So part of the campaign staff job was to make them feel useful, and to listen to them, but at the same time, you know, keep the campaign going. I mean, the Senator just couldn't see all these people all the time. Peter Rosenblatt was on that, too, and Harry. I've forgotten, who else did we have, Don? Jim -

DN: [Leslie H.] Les Gelb.

SA: Les Gelb, yes, Les Gelb, yes of course, Les and Tony. Where was Mort Halperin, no, I don't think so.

DN: Mort I think was consulted from time to time, but was not directly involved.

SA: The reason I'm so hesitant about it is that so many of those people have remained friends of ours for all these years, and I'm not sure whether I knew them then or knew them before or how. I mean like Les is still really a close friend of Mort and mine. I'm trying to think of women, did we have Pat Darion [sp]? No, we weren't liberal enough for Pat Darion.

DN: No, she wasn't involved.

SA: And did we have her husband? He's quite a nice fellow. Did we have [Richard] Dick Moose? I would have to think about it.

DN: I think Dick Moose did a few things.

SA: Yeah, it's really hard to remember. I'm thinking back on that big 19-, when was it that we had the big party for the Senator's birthday, and I saw all those people. But I do remember Ray Rasenberger, I traveled with him to Miami. I guess we had them fixed into various, there were lots of lawyers, and I remember one lawyer in particular, whose name completely skips, tried to get me to talk to this guy in Arkansas named Bill Clinton, and I think we turned up our nose at Bill Clinton.

There were a lot of very good people who were not, it's sort of interesting, this is a little bit unfair. But you know, most men who were coming into the campaign, especially the lawyer types, were all coming in with the idea of, you know, they were picking out their offices and whatever, executive agency or White House. The women were somewhat different, you know, this was still in the early seventies, so they were just in it for the kicks. I mean, I worked with a woman named Paige Wilson, very, later on, who was extremely liberal and able. What about that guy that's a friend of Paige's, Jim Rowe, or the head, he'd been head of the ADA? He didn't do too much for us, but I always found him interesting.

SA: Jim.

DN: Yes, Ann Wexler's husband.

SA: Oh, Joe Duffey, yes I still, yeah, but before Joe Duffey. Anyhow, we had a good time. I'm not sure whether these people feel, you know, if you do a speech or something and it's not used, or if you feel that they haven't listened, you know, it's a very tricky business. Sometimes I thought they were getting a break just by seeing Don or Berl, but. It was pretty interesting, and it is quite amazing how many of these people did stick with the Democratic, they stuck with us. Up until McGovern looked like he was going to win. But, you know, after all that was over we were all, how many of the Washington types we still see and still, still were active in Democratic politics up until, I'm sure they were helping Clinton. Remember Lanny Davis, we had all those young people? I certainly remember them.

The problem was that people do a great deal in self-interest, and that's very hard to manage. What is that guy's name, Bob Manning? Oh, he used to be furious if I didn't give him access,

and the speech wasn't used. I'm trying to think of the other speechwriters. It's Jack that you called on

DN: Well, there was Jack Sando, eventually Bob Shrum.

SA: Oh yes, Bob Shrum.

DN: And on the media side you had -

SA: Bob Squire.

DN: Bob Squire and his wife, and from the Hill you had both Dan Lewis and Maynard Toll.

SA: Oh right, and I still see Maynard. And I guess Jane wasn't married then, yeah. I do remember Maynard. And Madeleine [Albright]. I don't care what Madeleine's books say, I was the one to introduce Madeleine to the fund raisers as someone who might be potentially helpful. She moved very quickly from there to other things.

DN: I remember that very well.

SA: Yes, right. Everybody takes credit for it, but I think Madeleine would admit I did that. She was working as a, she was finishing her Ph.D. and she was married to Joe, and she was like the head of the fund raising committee for National Cathedral whatever, and she was a very well known kind of fund raiser in good causes in Washington, and we got her. And she went, and who was that guy that did fund raising then? Short, he looked like Buzzie Ryan, but it wasn't Buzzie Ryan.

DN: I'm drawing a blank at this.

SA: Yeah, there were two fundraisers. Anyhow, she went to work for him on this dinner, the first thing she did was that big dinner where they sent the pizzas.

DN: I remember a reception at her home early on that you arranged, in Georgetown.

SA: I don't know if I arranged it. Some of the things that she did I might have gone overseas or I can't remember, but she did start having, and I'm not sure at what point this was, but she started to have people over to meet the Senator and to talk to him, and to talk about issues. And I think that's one of the things she did to parlay herself out of just fund raising into, not just, but into some other more foreign policy stuff. But she had, you know, [John] McEvoy and those people, they weren't for having Madeleine Albright. The most difficult thing in a campaign is who's giving substantive advice, and how they get there. Because that's what people want to do. The one person, Don, I remember early on, was the milkman from Maine.

DN: Oh, you mean the telephone company man, Charlie Lander.

SA: The telephone company man, Charlie Lander. But also a milk industry guy. I don't know

why. Yeah, I remember Charlie Lander. And of course there was my namesake, Shep.

DN: Lee.

SA: Shep Lee who, God, strange as it can be, popped up in my life five years ago. Unbelievable. Mort went to Maine to give a speech, the World Council of whatever, Foreign Affairs Council. This guy, Shep Lee, came out to the airport and met him, and said, well, you know, we know your wife. We saw him, Shep Lee's helped with the International Crisis Group, has another very, quite a nice wife. I didn't know the first one, but very nice. And also because of Maine, George Mitchell, this is the greatest coincidence from my life, from my small view. George Mitchell, who I didn't directly work for ever, but who knew me, and I think I had gone overseas by the time George was (*unintelligible word*), I can't remember, but I think George Mitchell became the president of the International Crises Group which Mort put together. And he, even Mort even asked me what I thought about bringing George Mitchell and I said blithely, I didn't think George Mitchell was interested in foreign affairs, that shows how much I knew. This is before the he settled the Ireland thing, or came up with the Mideast solution, but anyhow we still see him occasionally. I don't remember, Don, give me some other people that you remember.

DN: Well, you've mentioned most of the key people who were involved, particularly on the substantive side. I was going to ask you, though, you mentioned people want access to the Senator. How much access did you have to the Senator, and how often?

SA: None at all, none at all. He did remember who I was, and he did, which always surprised me, and he did consider me "one of his people", as he said. I think during the middle of this, I can't remember how it worked, but for one reason or another Mort and I went to Honolulu, it must have been after the campaign. And I, what did he do after the campaign. He was a Senator, or he was a -?

DN: He was still in the Senate, he stayed in the Senate for the next -

SA: Yeah, and he came out. Mort was the political advisor at (*name*), and Gayle [Cory] sent me a telegram saying, you know, go out to the airport, meet him, take care of him, get him where, you know. Mort and I did that, and I had Mort with me, I was thrilled to see him, and he introduced me as one of his people to everybody and I was just sort of open jawed. Because that's the way he was, you know, he was quite aware of who everybody was and who was working for him. But I think that's accurate, he didn't pay too much attention. Occasionally Don would give me a break and send me into a meeting with him or something.

DN: Do you recall any of those meetings?

SA: Was I the note taker in some of them? Maybe I was on the pornography thing, because I have such a clear thing about Jack Valenti.

DN: What's your recollection of working with Jack on that issue?

SA: Well, I think the thing that surprised me, and which is quite unfair, is, you know, he's extremely smart and very able and very politically astute, but in those days he was just sort of one of, you know, someone like me (*interruption*) kind of looked at him as a flunky. I didn't realize how smart he was. I remember the meeting, being so impressed at how smart he was and how he was able to craft something that the Senator could accept, but still wasn't pro pornography. I mean, it was a very difficult issue. What other issues? I think I was probably sitting in on some of those meetings on the Mideast, which was troublesome then. But I don't think the Senator ever had a big problem about the Mideast, do you?

DN: Not at the time, no.

SA: Not at the time, no. I really don't, I don't know whether he had Jewish supporters or not, I can't remember that.

DN: Hmm-hmm, he had some fairly prominent members of the Jewish community (*unintelligible phrase*).

SA: Oh, you know who I remember? Sumner Redstone. Every time I read about Sumner Redstone, I remember that guy. Such, he made so much money, he did so well, and I think we all thought he was, what, light. Who knows? But you know, in a campaign all you want is for people to deliver what they say they're going to deliver, when they said they're going to deliver. And you want it to be sensible and smart and not just peddling their line, which is hard. I mean, every lobbyist in town wants you to say whatever is on their mind, even humanitarians. It was fun, I met a lot of people.

I also learned a lot about the power of the Washington law firms, which for some reason, since I'd been overseas a lot, didn't understand. And I'm sure it hasn't changed. Do you remember, you had Cy Vance, you had Tony, we went to New York for those meetings and Cy ran them, actually, I think that's how I knew Cy Vance. Who else were on those meetings, I don't know.

DN: Marshall Shulman.

SA: Marshall Shulman, yes.

DN: There was one, I'm trying to remember who else was in on those meetings, but the one who stands out in my mind is Marshall Shulman, and of course Paul Warnke here.

SA: Yes, Paul Warnke, exactly. Paul Warnke was the kind of guy who, even though I was really a lowly staffer, absolutely never forgot who, never forgot me, probably until the day he died, God bless him. He was really nice in that way. And he had Les and all these young smart guys. How about McGifford, McGifford worked with us, that's another one I know. And then he turned out to be Mort's boss. Gosh, poor McGifford. I shouldn't say poor McGifford, he's fine. But they were all so eager to be important then, you know. Ridiculous. I'm sure it's like every other campaign. I don't know about the discipline among the advisors, I don't know what Don would say. Probably isn't at all like the discipline that Bush supposedly has.

DN: No. That's good. Therefore good.

SA: Therefore, probably right. It was really let a thousand flowers bloom, a thousand what, you know. And there wasn't just a small, thinking back on it, you know, how Bush has had these three or four people who did foreign affairs, this, Bush II. You know, Condi [Condoleezza Rice] and [Paul] Wolfowitz and a few others, and they're still there and they're still doing it. There were zillions of people talking to Muskie, lots. Muskie, though, was very, very smart. I'm sure you've heard this, but he's really, really one of the smartest people. I was always amazed that Mort and I during that period had such contact with such smart people as Muskie and Elliot Richardson, they were both really smart and quick, and committed deep thinkers. I mean, I know it sounds sentimental, but I don't think any of the guys I have to work with on the Hill now really come up to the quality of Ed Muskie, didn't, no, I can't even think of one.

DN: How did that come through to you?

SA: Well first of all he liked to go there, and he didn't, you know, during the campaigning, he'd really want to spend a weekend in Maine. He liked his friends from Maine, he talked about it all the time. And then the issues that he was really interested in, the environmental issues, were Maine issues. And transportation, that's why I think I must remember about the roads. Don, this is a long time ago.

DN: Oh, yeah.

SA: More than thirty years.

DN: And if you, as you finished up the campaign, then Mort had other overseas assignments after '72?

SA: Actually, I went back to, he went, let's see, he was in the Defense Department, and we went to Thailand. And he was appointed, actually, by Jimmy Carter to Thailand, I'm pretty sure about that. And that was our first ambassadorial post, but I can't remember the sequence of events. I probably went, I went back to work for the universities before the end of the campaign, when it looked like he wasn't going to get the nomination.

And then I was working for the California State University when we went, that's what happened, I was working for Cal State when we went overseas. He left from the Pentagon, and I left from there and we went to Thailand. And then the Senator became Secretary of State, and you have that other great Senator story about being the Secretary of State. As far as he was concerned, Mort, who was the ambassador to Thailand, it was a very active post at the time. Mort was merely Sheppie's husband. That's how I'll always remember, the only person in the whole city of Washington, I mean Mort was such a big deal ambassador then, but anyhow.

DN: How did that reference come up?

SA: That's what he told Dick Holbrook.

DN: That Senator Muskie told Dick Holbrook.

SA: Yes, when they were looking at the list of ambassadors for East Asia, he replaced Cy Vance, right? Holbrook said, "Well, there's this guy Abramowitz there, he's doing all this stuff on the refugee thing." And he said, "Oh yeah, that's Sheppie's husband." Dick Holbrook was amazed, that just, you know, dear Dick, he can't quite see that. He called me right up. Then we were in Thailand until the end of the Carter administration and then Reagan came, and then we came back.

DN: Now during the period when Mort was ambassador to Thailand, did he have any direct contacts with the Secretary within that 1980 period?

SA: Well, you know, Dick Holbrook was the assistant secretary, and, for East Asia, and it's not likely that anybody would go around this particular assistant secretary. Occasionally Berl I guess might call Mort, but really not. Mort, you know, was a Foreign Service officer. It was a very brief period, wasn't it, that he was secretary?

DN: Yeah. Now, just in terms of your own work, it was in Thailand that you really got engaged in refugee issues, or did that follow the Thai experience?

SA: No, no. I first worked for the International Rescue Committee in the sixties in Hong Kong, when I was pregnant with Michael. It was thirty-eight years ago. And then I worked for them sort of teaching English and as a volunteer, and when I came back occasionally I worked as a volunteer. But in Thailand, we had this big refugee crisis, and IRC came out and I worked for them again. And then we went eventually to Austria, where there were also refugees so I worked on refugees then. And then we went to, eventually went to Turkey where there was another refugee crisis, and finally someone said, "Keep Abramowitz out of our country because they're always a refugee crisis." But I did work for IRC all the time, most of the time.

DN: Any reflections on Senator Muskie as a result of your experience?

SA: Well, as a result of my experience, you know, now I'm, I had been the vice president for government relations, now I'm simply consultant to IRC. I spent a fair amount of time on the Hill and I don't, and the issues have changed, but I really do think that I never would find a senator like that. You know, I know about his personality, but aside from his quirky, you know, he was a great man. Not only had a lot of stature, but he had a great presence and a great mind, and I don't know, tell me who's up there now? Joe Biden? No. Even though I agree with Joe Biden. Patrick Leahy? He's nice. Lieberman? He's okay. I don't know. Who, who, who do you think?

DN: The only person I've heard compared with Ed Muskie, and this I'm reporting, not endorsing, is John McCain.

SA: Ah, yes, well we all like John McCain in this office. But we like him for two reasons, one, he's great on refugees and he makes no bones about it. And I think he's been admirable because it started with him wanting to protect Vietnamese refugees. God knows why, after all that time. But yeah, we all liked him. But Ed was much more thoughtful and much smarter.

McCain is instinctive in all of those, and aggressive, but, and has, you know, did campaign reform. But, oh, Ed was a different, I really think a different level of brain power. I don't know, what did you think?

DN: Well, I think your appraisal is correct, solid.

SA: Yeah, no, Ed was fine. It was a privilege; it was really fun. And it was also serendipity, you know. The other thing about it which I didn't get sort of sensible, we had, I don't know who organized it, maybe Don knows, but for his seventieth, fiftieth, or his seventieth birthday, I forgot, that big thing we had?

DN: That would have been his seventieth.

SA: This huge thing, and I was amazed first at how close all of us still were, second how many people were still in politics, and third how loyal people still were. I mean, this is a man, Ed always was supposedly hard on his staff. I don't know. He was hard on his staff, but I was on a level so low it wouldn't have, it didn't get to me. I think. I mean, he never would yell at me or anything like that. And how many of us are all still friendly because we sort of believed in what he was doing? It was an easier time, though, being liberal, you knew what it stood for. I'm not sure, these guys, though, I never have liked the Republicans. Even Olympia Snowe, who's good on women refugees.

DN: Well thank you very much.

SA: It was great.

End of Interview